

Units written by Dr Pam Macintyre & Dr Susan La Marca

# Growing Up Asian in Australia

## **Growing up Asian in Australia** **edited by Alice Pung**

**Year 10 and 11**

### **Background**

*The pieces in this anthology – like Asian-Australians are so diverse, and the beauty of the book is that it shatters all stereotypes people may have about Asian-Australians...What moved me was the resilience of our writers, their creativity, humour, quirk and insight – sometimes against severe racism, personal illness, familial pressures and pressure from society to conform...I wanted to bring out the common humanity of our authors, so that any reader could pick up the book and be amused, amazed, moved and heartened.*

Excerpt from an interview with Alice Pung on her website:  
<http://alicepung.com>

Sixty-two powerful, touching, confronting and hilarious recollections form the richness of this collection from Asian-Australians, including the well-known and not so well-known. The well-known embrace Melbourne's former Lord Mayor John So, chef and restaurateur Kylie Kwong, comedian Anh Do, television broadcaster Annett Shun Wah, author and illustrator Shaun Tan, Reguritor's lead singer Quan Yeomans, fashion designer Jenny Kee, among many others who bring their formative years alive in prose, poetry and image.

*It is one of those books that had to be published, and that must be available in every school library...It will indeed provide mirrors for Asian Australian students, mirrors that are heart-rending and hilarious...the anthology leaves an Anglo Australian like me uncomfortable at the prevailing belief that coming to Australia is like moving from some awful hell without sanitation to a hygienic Aussie heaven. Not so, of course.*

Chris Wheat *Viewpoint: on books for young adults*. 16 (3) pp. 30-31.

### **Objectives**

The Physical, Personal and Social Learning strand of *VELS* suggests:

*Students explore and consider different perspectives and articulate and justify their own opinions on local, national and global issues. They use reflective thinking to refine their own opinions, values and allegiances.*

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2005) *The VELS, Physical, Personal and Social Learning - Civics and Citizenship Level 2*, p. 24.

*The National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* says:

*[Students] are able to relate and communicate across cultures, especially in relation to culture and countries of the Asia Pacific.*

National Curriculum Board (2008), 'The Shape of the National Curriculum' in *The National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* p. 5.

### Focus

This is a rich collection of recollections that celebrate the diversity of contemporary Australia, challenge mainstream Anglo Australians to see themselves from the outside, and which are frequently powerfully moving and always entertaining. *Growing up Asian in Australia* opens up many possibilities for sharing in the classroom. Here are two possibilities:

### Identity

- Invite your class to construct a sociogram of how many different versions there are of being Australian within the class, Australia being a country of immigration from its beginnings.
- Australian identity – read aloud 'Exotic rissole' by Tanveer Ahmed (or play Tanveer reading it himself from the video of the launch of *Growing up Asian in Australia* available on Alice Pung's website, or at <http://blip.tv/file/957741>). Discuss the different home lives of the two boys. Also talk about the similar family experiences that Tanveer highlights.
- Individual identity: One of the great Australian mythologies is its egalitarian nature.
  - Does 'Egalitarian Australia' exist? Begin with Sunil Badami's 'Sticks and Stones and such-like' about growing up Indian Australian in northern Australia, with moments that will make dominant culture Australians squirm.
  - Then perhaps look at selections from different periods, such as 'Lessons from My School Years' by Ray Wing-Lun set in Sydney in the 1950s, 'The Upside-Down Year' by Francis Lee, about being a student from Hong Kong in Australia during the 1960s to 'The Beat of a different Drum' by another Hong Kong student in Geelong in the 1980s.
  - Is much changing in Australia, especially in terms of attitudes and behaviour?

### From the outside

- These recollections also position Anglo Australians to view their country, its values and mores from outside the mainstream. For example: you could revisit 'Exotic rissole' from this perspective, along with 'Wei-Lie and me' by Aditi Gouvernel.
- Is there such a thing as the 'typical Aussie battler', or the typical Australian?
- Talk about what readers have learned about themselves and their country from reading these recollections.

### Assessment

- Each student is to write a pivotal anecdote in their lives in the first person. As in *Growing Up Asian in Australia* it could be in the form of prose, poetry or comic strip.
- Produce a class anthology of what it means to be Australian in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and make it available for borrowing in the library – if in print form, or publish on the web.



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## Related Reading

### The Australian experience

- Amor, Meaghan and Janet Austin *From Nothing to Zero: letters from refugees in Australia's detention centres.*
- Cunxin, Li *Mao's Last Dancer*
- Khan, Adib *Seasonal Adjustments*  
*Spiral Road*
- Le, Nam *The Boat*
- Pung, Alice *Unpolished Gem*

### Websites

- <http://alicepung.com>
- <http://www.racismnoway.com.au/>

Alice Pung says at the launch of *Growing Up Asian in Australia* that she wanted Australian stories to be told and a valuable comparison would be with stories from other countries:

- Na, An *A Step from Heaven*
- Ung, Luong *Lucky Child*
- Ung, Luong *First they Killed my Father*
- Yang, Gene Luen *American Born Chinese*

### Australian Migrant Experiences

- Abdel-Fattah, Randa *Does my Head Look Big in This?*
- Abdel-Fattah, Randa *Ten Things I Hate About Me*
- Fusillo, Archimede *The Dons*  
*Sparring with Shadows*
- Marchetta, Melina *Looking for Alibrandi*
- Sallis, Eva, Heather Millar and Sonja Dechian, editors, *Dark Dreams Australian Refugee Stories by Young Writers aged 11-20*
- Savvides, Irini *Alikì Says*
- Tan, Shaun *Tales from Outer Suburbia*
- Tan, Shaun *The Arrival*

Edited by  
**Alice Pung**